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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1871

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2318

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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3072

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001492

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2018

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PRIVATE HOTEL OWNER (AND SABIT ALUMNUS) COMPLAINS ABOUT GOVERNMENT MONOPOLY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1. 4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) On November 7 econoff stayed at the Shahabad Hotel in Dashoguz city, a private hotel owned and operated by U.S. Department of Commerce Special American Business Internship Program (SABIT) alumnus Ramanberger Ibragimov. Ibragimov's pride in his hotel, located on the second floor of a building which he built following independence in 1992, is obvious. At check-in, one of his staff members shows the guest the clean room, pointing out that everything works and that television channels from all over the world in every language are available via the satellite. (COMMENT: The lack of customer-oriented focus, a holdover from the Soviet Union, is widespread in establishments outside of the capital. END COMMENT.) The bathroom is appointed with British fixtures, including a completely closed in shower -- not a common feature in Central Asian hotel bathrooms. Ibragimov's stationery store, a photography studio, and a computer store on the first floor are decorated with antique photography equipment and a display of photographs of his family and old Dashoguz, dating back to his great-grandfather. He described his current business volume as "not good, and not bad."

¶2. (C) Ibragimov's pride in his participation in the SABIT Hotel and Restaurant Management Program is evident. Certificates and photos documenting his trip to the U.S. and his membership in an American hotel and restaurant association hang in the hotel's entry hall. However, Ibragimov's share of tourists staying in hotels is small due to the fact that he cannot register foreigners. And foreigners are required to register where they are staying. Ibragimov said that the "state hotels have the monopoly on tourists." His guests are generally Turkmen businessmen who can afford to pay \$45 per night (including a homecooked breakfast), or foreigners residing in Turkmenistan such as embassy and international organization employees. Ibragimov also said that he didn't understand what the registration regime was all about, since "in the U.S. they just put a stamp in my passport and I could go where I wanted."

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite Turkmenistan's unfriendly climate for private industry, Ibragimov continues to persevere with

his various businesses. Ibragimov is a prime example of why it is so important to continue to press for more participation in exchange programs. Exposure to other ways of doing things will continue to serve as a prime force for progress in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

CURRAN